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ZOLA AND LITERARY NATURALISM.¹

IT is now some twenty-five years ago since the preface of *La Fortune des Rougon* announced the programme of that series of novels, if we may call them so, which is just coming to a close with *Docteur Pascal* in the columns of the *Revue Hebdomadaire*. In that preface, Zola undertook to show how "the slow succession of accidents of nerve and blood declare themselves in a race as the result of a primary organic lesion, and determine according to his surroundings in each of the individuals that compose it, the feelings, desires, passions, all the human manifestations, natural and instinctive, to whose products we give the conventional names, virtues and vices." This has suggested to others a remark of Taine, by which it was perhaps suggested to Zola himself, that "virtue and vice are products, like vitriol and sugar." But Zola seems, at least at the outset, to have taken it with less reserve than its originator. So in the nineteen volumes before us, we have what he calls "the natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire." They are to be, according to his essay, "*Le Roman Experimental*," works of the most thorough realism, minute studies of social phenomena for each trait in which the author shall be able to cite his authority, "human documents" in short. So with indefatigable conscientiousness he studies the workings of a locomotive from the engine cab, shares the life of the farm,

¹*La Débâcle*, par Emile Zola. Paris. 1892.

and even makes a pilgrimage to Lourdes, all in the interest of "naturalism"—and perhaps of advertisement.

And yet, in spite of it all, in spite of himself, Zola is not a naturalist, but rather the greatest of living French idealists, and, since Victor Hugo's death, first of her prose poets. This was most interestingly brought out, in its time, by Symonds, in his review of *La Bête Humaine*.¹ It impresses itself not alone on readers of *Le Rêve*, but in another and higher kind in *La Terre*, in *Germinal* and in *La Débâcle*. This seems to us fortunate. Zola is a genius; his theory is wrong, but his literary instinct is right. He rises above his ideal, and earns a palm of praise while his scholars, too faithful to his teachings, are apt to weary and dishearten.

The vast range of Zola's social studies becomes apparent if we review, merely in the briefest way, the central subjects of his volumes. He aims to cover all France. The family-tree of the Rougon-Macquart, affixed to *Une Page d'Amour*, exhibits representatives of this family within three generations, in almost every social sphere. *La Fortune des Rougon*, *La Conquête de Plassans*, *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* show us life in provincial towns. The farm furnishes the scene of *La Terre*, and, in a measure, for *La Joie de Vivre*. *Germinal* introduces us to a great miners' strike; *Le Ventre de Paris* tells of the Paris market gardens and the *Halles*. *La Curée* deals with the financial debauch that followed the *coup d'état*, and *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* takes up the parable of political corruption. *Nana* introduces to the inner shrine of the goddess of lubricity those who care to see its foulness, while *L'Assommoir* is a temperance tale of the Paris workmen. The small shop-keepers are represented in *Pot-Bouille*, and the great establishments like *Au Bon Marche* and *Au Louvre* are spread before us in *Au Bonheur des Dames*. *La Bête Humaine* is a railroad epic, *L'Œuvre* deals with artist life, *L'Argent* with the stock exchange, *La Débâcle* with the army, which takes, whether he will or no,

¹*Fortnightly Review*, October, 1891.

a considerable place in every Frenchman's life. Religious mysticism forms the subject of that exquisite idyl *Le Rêve*. Passionate jealousy is analyzed in *Une Page d'Amour*, celibacy in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret*, and clerical ambition in *La Conquête de Plassans*. And so we might go on, but surely enough has been said to show that an honest effort has been made to make this series a microcosmic picture of French life under the star of the third Napoleon.

Few men have the courage to form a literary plan that a quarter of a century of unremitting, pains-taking labor shall not suffice to complete. Yet the plan of this series was clearly thought out from the first. Fewer still, having formed such a plan, have the endurance to carry it to an end. But perhaps Zola's is the unique instance in which the popular interest in the author and his work has increased to the last. Critics may weary of him. A brilliant essayist, writing but a few months ago, tells us that Zola is a matter of yesterday¹; but on the other hand the French editors, consulted by the *Petit Journal* as to what forty men should form the real "Academy" in place of the forty self-elected, found that Zola headed the poll with 1,193 votes, while the largest number accorded to any competitor was 774 for Taine, and Daudet could muster but 718. But beyond this, we have the clearest evidence that Zola's popularity is not waning, in the sales of his works. The first six of the series have attained an average sale of less than 32,000. No volume that follows has fallen below 44,000. Leaving aside the somewhat phenomenal success of *L'Assommoir* and *Nana*, with sales of 127,000 and 166,000 respectively, we have for the next six of the series an average of over 67,000, or, including *Nana* and *L'Assommoir*, an average of 87,000. But the four following, while containing no such conspicuous success, yet averaged 90,000, and *La Débâcle*, his last work, though for the shortest time on the market, already exceeds all the others with 176,000 at the time of our writing. Certainly this looks very much as

¹*Portraits d'Ecrivains, par René Doumic.* Paris. Delaplane. 1892.

though, to the reading public, M. Zola were still very much a man of the present.

It is with this last book, *La Débâcle*, that we wish particularly to deal here; but it is perhaps fitting that a word should first be said of some qualities of diction and of subject which are associated with Zola's name, probably to his prejudice in the minds of many readers. It is said that the conversation of the lower classes in his books abounds with words and phrases that sound strangely to ears polite, nay, that the dictionary will not always suffice to pilot us through its mazes. Further, judging the unknown by the known, many of these words are suspected, I fear with good reason, to be more or less coarse, low, or even blasphemous. To our objection Zola will answer, "Such men would use such language;" and this I think every person who has associated with them, even superficially, as the foreign student of manners can do in the cafés or wine-shops and at popular places of entertainment and festivals, will find confirmed by his experience. If now it is worth while to show the workman as he is, a study of his language is a means not to be neglected. "The style is the man" quite as truly in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine as in the Academy. We shall never quite comprehend the moral decay of any class if we draw a veil over all their expressions of it. There is of course a question of quantity as well as of degree. It may be urged with some justice that there is more of this in Zola's work than is artistically justifiable. It is also true that such reading may be unpleasant to some people, who would rather hear of the heathen in Dahomey than of the heathen at home, and of others whose calling does not bring them in contact with baser social forms. These will naturally leave it aside; but on the other hand we hardly see that it is likely to injure those whom it does not offend, while every deeper insight that we get into the moral, intellectual, and æsthetic gulf that separates the reading public from the toiling majority of their fellow men, should tend to strengthen and deepen those feelings of duty to our

neighbor that lie at the basis of what is called "Christian Socialism."

There is another and a graver charge that is most usually made against Zola and his books by those who do not read them. They are said to be "shockingly immoral." We may distinguish here between the intent of the author and the effect of the book. To an author who sets out with the attempt to be pornographic, nothing is easier than to succeed in his chosen line, for this, the cheapest form of all wit, is more universally understood and appreciated than any other. To say nothing of its moral bearings, such success must satisfy only the lowest of literary ambitions. A Catulle Mendès and a Silvestre may be willing to prostitute to this end what talents they possess. But Zola is too serious, too much in earnest, for us to attribute to him such frivolity, and indeed there is very little of the satyr even in his youthful writing, and, so far as I see, none at all in this last. I doubt if Zola ever wrote a page with pornographic intent. But to acquit the author does not necessarily exculpate the book.

Now it cannot be denied that the greater part of the novels in this series contain scenes and situations that we should be sorry to have promiscuously read. Not only do they bring before us, with a fulness that shocks our finer senses, the details of experiences that are usually confined to the nurse and the surgeon—for instance, in the work before us, the pile of human limbs outside the field hospital after the battle, with that horrible touch of the forgotten hand lying by the door, or some scene of bestial ferocity such as the butchery of the Prussian spy, Goliath, by the *franc-tireurs* (*La Débâcle*, p. 538)—but they also admit us to penetralia of the sexual and maternal relations that English writers are apt to avoid, or at least to veil. It may be perhaps that both English and French are alike justified. It is not a sufficient condemnation of a book to say or to prove that it is not fit to be read everywhere, always, and by all. There are many treatises most essential to the alienist and the phy-

sician that would produce morbid effects on many readers. All public libraries have a story to tell of the persistent and ingenious efforts to abuse books that have their legitimate use. Now the English novelist addresses himself to several classes of readers that the Frenchman excludes from his circle. I suppose the majority of novel readers among us are women, and our novelists write with the fear of the *ewige Weibliche* ever before their eyes. I do not mean by this that they are always moral. Have we not Albert Ross and Amélie Rives and—but it is not necessary to extend the list. Still our English immorality is calculated for another meridian than the French. In France there is a school of writers who regard the morality of a work of art as a matter of indifference. But this brings us into the unsavory company of Mendès and Silvestre, from whom Zola is as different as the palm from its parasite. He sets out to paint life as he finds it. He finds a large part of the society he studies under the domination of low motives, and chief among these springs of action he finds the sexual passion, which of course expresses itself more frankly among the lower orders of society, as all passions do. Repression is an acquired art of civilization. His vision of the facts is clear enough; he sets down nothing in malice. However, when he attempts to give his observations literary form, he is perforce false to his naturalist theory. The poet gets the better of the statistician, and becomes an idealist, to our gain and his own.

If we ask ourselves whether the social life he depicts in *Nana* or *L'Assommoir* has anything corresponding to its base licentiousness in the real life of Paris, he will be ready with chapter and verse to answer. And yet it is not typical of normal average conditions, nor ought it to be; for fiction, to be a social power, must show us not where we stand, but whither we are going. And this it does by showing those whom the current has carried furthest. And so it is well that men, who must live in the world and need to know its evil as well as its good tendencies, should ponder the story

of Nana and Lantier, of Gervaise and of Maurice. I do not say that it is pleasant reading, but there is much of bitter wisdom in Daudet's dedication of *Sapho*, "to my son when he is twenty years old."

Now if, as Brunetière is constantly preaching in the *Revue des deux Mondes* and elsewhere,¹ French literature has earned its universality because its energies have been directed to the study of social problems, while the English literature does homage to the individual, and the German to the philosophic spirit, is it not precisely such a holding of the mirror up to nature, even in its deformity, that will make this social literature useful as a reflection of social conditions and public morals, and so fit French literature to maintain the place it has won among the literatures of the world? Assuredly it is not the soporific platitudes of M. Ohnet, nor the incoherent ravings of the decadent poets that will assist it in this or any other worthy ambition.

But though we are disposed to justify Zola against those who accuse him of pandering to a prurient fancy, we are glad that he has written in French, and we could wish that he had not been translated, even as execrably and incompletely as he has been. It is well that some books, good and necessary as they be, should not be in a language "understood of the people." I believe a pope once included the Bible among them, and it is said that the French philosopher Taine expressed the wish that some of his books had been in Latin, that he might not have been so much misunderstood by the Philistines.

For this last work of Zola's one need, however, make few apologies or reservations. Vulgar men continue to talk their own language, it is true; there may be some questions of literary taste, but all that could offend the British matron is anxiously forced into the background, even where, from a purely artistic point of view such reticence is uncalled for. The subject, or shall we rather say the scene of this

¹E. g., in the *Fortnightly Review* for October, 1892.

novel is the terrible year of the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune. This is unrolled to us in the main as it appeared to two members of the Rougon-Macquart family. Maurice, a Parisian, educated, yet narrow, feeling and expressing with what threatens to be wearisome iteration the degeneracy of his race, brave at times, yet with little staying power, mental or physical, who finally joins the Commune in a fit of patriotic pessimism; and that Jean, whose domestic misfortunes played a considerable part in *La Terre*, who becomes here a type of the sober-minded, sound-hearted peasant in whom lies the future hope of his country. Neither is typical of the average French soldier, but each in his kind is the most developed product of social forces that influenced all France in a greater or less degree. Jean is Maurice's corporal; and in their squad we find the country lad, Pache, with some recollections of his early religious training, the sport, and at last the victim of Chouteau, a worthless Parisian *voyou*, and Lapouille, whose god was his belly. Loubet, the other man in the squad, has his worthlessness redeemed by a genius for cooking, a character useful in developing for us the shifty incompetence of the French commissariat. Above these are the lieutenant, Rochas, ignorant but brave, and thoroughly convinced that the French have only to be brought face to face with any enemy to drive them indefinitely *à coups de pied à derrière*. Then there is the captain, Beaudoin, proud, dandified, contemptuous toward his men, deserting his post for an amorous rendezvous on the eve of Sedan, hated but brave, and meeting death without forgetting good manners. The colonel, de Vineuil, and the general, Bourgain-Desfeuilles, are more lightly sketched, and yet clearly enough to show that bravery in the officers could not countervail self-indulgent impatience and overconfident incapacity.

The story opens with the forced march of the Seventh Corps to Mulhouse, and introduces us to Weiss, an Alsatian, who has married Henriette, Maurice's sister. He lives at

Sedan, and knows too much of frontier affairs to be hopeful of the issue. We meet also their cousin, Honoré Fouchard, son of a miserly peasant, and catch our first glimpse of the Prussian spy, Goliath, sometime a servant at Fouchard's. The first chapters picture, perhaps, in too great detail the gradual discouragement and disorganization of the troops as they march and countermarch, without apparent purpose, without rations, or without a chance to cook them, never in sight of the enemy, insulting their leaders and themselves insulted by the people they abandoned; and in the midst of this hungry disorder we catch sight of the Emperor, "dragged about like a useless encumbrance among the baggage of his troops, condemned to trail behind him the irony of his imperial establishment, his Cent-Gardes, his carriages, horses, cooks, and baggage wagons, with their silver saucepans and their champagne." A tragic figure throughout the book, more sinned against than guilty.

Gradually we see the army forced by its blunders and by the enemy into the fortified trap at Sedan, and the great shears of the German armies begin to close on them. And this brings us to one of the finest pieces of French prose that this century has given us, the defense of Bazeilles, the first point of the German attack, (pp. 212-224, 285-297) where Weiss, being captured as a combating civilian, is shot before the eyes of his wife, and almost in her arms. Indeed the whole battle of Sedan is a masterpiece, reaching its acme perhaps in the great cavalry charge of Margueritte's division (pp. 319-322), which may well supersede the famous Waterloo charge of Victor Hugo as the finest battle picture of literature.

Meantime there is a field hospital set up in Sedan to remind us that the horrors of war do not end with the battles. Here is surgeon Bouroche, a sympathetic combination of science and heart, who contends now against administrative incapacity, and after the capitulation against Prussian jealousy. It would be interesting to know with what authority

the statement is made that they refused him chloroform for his wounded, though there were Germans as well as French among them.

On the morning of the battle we see the Emperor again, sick in body and at heart, and with a constancy that is not without its virtue, now seeking death in the front, now striving to hide with rouge the traces of disease on his face. This last touch has brought upon Zola the thunders of the *Revue des deux Mondes*, followed by the scattering fire of smaller journals. The story seems untrue, though not lacking some evidence; but whether true or false, the controversy over it has been of considerable value since it has evoked from M. Zola the statement that he regards such details as matters where a poet may justly take the version that suits him, a doctrine of "probable opinions" in naturalistic literature that adds much force to our contention that Zola is really an idealist. Zola himself thinks that artistic critics should not have been disposed to cavil. He "finds the act superb, worthy of one of Shakspeare's heroes, heightening the figure of Napoleon III. to a tragic melancholy of infinite grandeur." This will probably be the idea that thoughtful readers will form of Zola's conception of the Emperor even without his explanation.

After the cavalry charge, perhaps the most striking scene of the battle is that of a retreat through a cannonaded wood, "bombarded trees, killed at their post, falling on all sides like immobile, giant soldiers. Beneath their fronds, in the delicious green half-light, down mysterious aisles carpeted with moss, breathed brutal death. The solitude of the forest-springs was violated, and those hidden corners, where, till then, lovers alone had wandered, now heard the gasps of the dying. One man, his chest pierced by a ball, had only time to cry 'hit,' and fell on his face dead. Another, whose two legs had just been broken by a shell, still laughed, unconscious of his wound, thinking that he had stumbled on a root. Others with pierced limbs, mortally wounded, ran on for many yards before they fell in sudden convulsions. At

the first instant, even the worst wounds were hardly felt. It was only later that the dreadful sufferings began, and burst out in cries and tears."

"Oh, that cursed wood, that massacred forest, that in the midst of the sobbing of the expiring trees was being filled little by little with the shrieking distress of the wounded . . . But the dead and the wounded were no longer reckoned. The comrade who fell was abandoned, forgotten. Not even a step back; it was fate; another, himself, perhaps, would be next

"All at once as they reached the edge of the wood there rang out an appealing cry: 'Help' Then seeing that nobody stopped, he caught breath, and cried: 'The flag.' At a bound, Rochas, darting back, caught the flag, whose pole was broken, while the ensign murmured, his words stifled in bloody foam: 'It's all up with me. Save the flag.' And he remained alone writhing on the moss, in that delicious woodland dell, tearing the grass with his clenched hands, his chest heaving with a rattle that lasted for hours."

And then as they emerge from the wood, and get temporary shelter from the enemy's fire, they meet their general, asking a crippled peasant woman, with frightened curses, the road to Belgium. And through all the horrible day, we catch glimpses now and then of King William, silent and motionless, on the heights of Marfée, watching the great panorama as it unrolled the changing destiny of Europe. And, strange contrast, Maurice, as he carries the stunned Jean from the field, sees, in a little valley, protected by its steep sides, "a peasant methodically tilling his land, pushing before him his plough, harnessed to a great white horse. Why lose a day? Because people were fighting, would the corn cease to grow, and the world to live?"

The close of a battle does not end its horrors. The search of his fiancée for the body of Honoré allows a description which has many passages of great power. It is true that they take us over in part the same ground that we have traversed before in the story of the battle itself; and

this has seemed a fault to some, but to our mind it is not an artistic defect, though it is certainly a bold venture of a writer sure of his power, to describe with equal vividness and care first the process and then the result. Here we see a boy picking up French rifles, for which the Germans are giving him five cents apiece; there a flock of crows rise from the fresh carrion. In Balan they found a group of dead zouaves seated as though carousing at a table. "Had they dragged themselves there, still living, to die together? Was it rather the Prussians who had picked them up, and set them around it as a mockery of the old French gayety?" But among all the horrors of this ghastly search, none seems to me so weird as this scene in the open field.

"Suddenly Prosper felt the ground shake under the trampling of a terrific charge. He turned, and had just time to cry to his companion: 'The horses, the horses; throw yourself behind that wall.'

"From the height of a neighboring slope an hundred horses, free, riderless, some still carrying all their trappings, plunged and rushed toward them at an infernal pace. They were the lost beasts who had remained on the field, and by instinct had gathered themselves in a troop. Without hay or oats since two days, they had cropped the scanty grass, nibbled the hedges, gnawed the bark of the trees, and when hunger pricked their bellies like a spur, they went off all together in a mad gallop, charged across the empty plain, crushing the dead, killing the wounded." Later on we hear that they were caught, one by one, and sold to the thrifty peasants for twenty francs apiece.

Human harpies were already stripping the dead, and the Germans were hastening their burial, compelling the peasants to the task, while in the midst of it all, we have this little picture. "At the farm-house there were only Prussians, with a servant and her child who had come back from the woods, where they had nearly died of hunger and thirst. It was a corner of patriarchal good humor (*bonhomie*), of worthy repose after the fatigues of the previous days. Some

soldiers were carefully brushing their uniforms hung on clothes-lines. Another was finishing a neat darn in his trousers, while in the middle of the court-yard the cook of the post had lighted a great fire over which the soup was boiling in a great pot, which exhaled a good odor of cabbage and lard. The conquest was already organizing itself with perfect tranquillity and discipline. You might have taken them for citizens, home again, smoking their long pipes. On a bench at the door, a great ruddy man had taken in his arms the servant's child, a boy of five or six, and he made him jump, and said little caressing words to him in German, much amused to see the child laugh at this strange language with the rough syllables, which he could not understand."

In Sedan itself there was a man-hunt for the soldiers who had hidden in garrets and cellars to escape captivity. But we must pass over this, as well as the temporary confinement of the starving army on the peninsular of Iges, where the German inability to provide at once for the needs of this multitude caused intense suffering. On the march to Germany, Maurice and Jean escape, but Jean is wounded and constrained to remain in secret, under the care of Henriette, during the whole winter, while Maurice gets finally to Paris in time to take part in the siege.

Henriette is a nurse in a military hospital, of which we have some vivid sketches, but her devoted care of Jean has gradually aroused in them both, quite unconsciously, mutual feelings of tenderness. Here first at the 510th page the shadow of romance passes across the naturalistic sky. But Jean is impatient to rejoin the army; he stays long enough however to witness the horrible murder of the Prussian spy, Goliath, by the *franc-tireurs*, for whom it is clear the author has no great sympathy. Jean rejoins Maurice at last in Paris, after the surrender, and on the eve of the Commune. Physical and moral suffering have upset the mental balance of the high-strung youth, and he sees the hope of the future only in the destruction of the present. Hence he is drawn into the vortex of the Commune, whither of course the sober-

mind Jean cannot follow him. "Oh, no, no, my dear, I won't stay, if it's for this pretty business," he says. "My captain told me to go to Vaugirard, with my men, and I'm going there. Though the thunder of God were there, I would go just the same. That's natural. You must feel that." In these brief words we have his character. And so they part, to meet again at the barricades, Jean piercing Maurice with his bayonet, in the midst of blazing Paris, and then, recognizing in the wounded man his brother in arms, bearing him home to Montmatre, whither Henriette has just made her way through a thousand perils, to find her brother mortally wounded, and her lover his murderer, to her, however he may have been to others, the executioner of a righteous judgment. It was the end of what had hardly had a beginning. There was nothing left for them but to sob, farewell. And so the book closes with dignified simplicity. "The ravaged field was fallow, the burned house levelled, and Jean, most humble, most dolorous, went on, marching to the future, to the great, the hard task, a whole France to be re-created."

This simplicity seems to us the height of art. Mr. Moore, in the *Fortnightly Review*, thinks "it to be deeply regretted that M. Zola did not throw history to the winds and develop the beautiful human story of the division of friends in civil war." Balzac, it seems, "would have given us another such picture of manly grief as we find in *Le Curé de Village*," or perhaps "he would have given us the cruelty of capture and the refusal of Jean to serve in the squad told off to shoot Maurice; Jean would have been condemned to death for insubordination, perhaps, and, again holding each other's hands, the friends would have died together." We dislike to differ from so eminent a critic, but it seems to us precisely Zola's greatness that he did not end it so, with a cheap appeal to sentiment, but that he makes Jean kill Maurice, as sane France killed the insane Commune, and then take up his task again with sad resolution. We have no quarrel with M. Zola's self-restraint here, but if we are to criticise aught

it would be in accord with this same critic, that he lacks it elsewhere. The book shows haste; it could have been filed, polished, and above all, pruned. It does not leave on us the vivid impression as a whole that branded itself on our minds from *Germinal* or *Nana*. Its place seems to us to be after these, with *L'Assommoir* and *La Terre*.

But even if we accord it this second place, it is a book for which modern literature is distinctly the richer. War is the scene of countless tales, but we have never had the like of this to bring before us with startling reality what war means; not to the general in his tent, but to the soldier in the field; how it rouses sometimes the best, more often the worst in our nature, how, finally, for a France, of which the Rougon-Macquart family were typical, it was the only road to regeneration, if haply there were yet a road, which time must show.

We have seen that Zola is looked on by some as a matter of yesterday. The recent and the latest phases of literary change, we do not say development, are not on naturalistic lines. Of course a school that counts the venerable Edmond de Goncourt as its *doyen*, and Huysmans, Alexis, Henique, and Ceard among its present or recent adherents is not dead, and this leaves out of account the neo-naturalists, Caraguel, Rosny, Mirbeau, Geffroy, and especially Hermant. But the criticism of the day is apt to take more notice of the newer schools, occultists, symbolists, psychologists, metaphysicians, or whatever they are pleased to dub themselves. Among all the romancers of these groups, however, we discern signs of longevity only in Maupassant and Bourget. The former was once a follower of Zola, then an introspective pessimist psychologist, and is now, alas! insane, having reached the goal to which his fellow psychologists are tending with somewhat greater speed than they. Maupassant is simply the unequalled master of the short story, never surpassed in concise power, strength and grace of style. Bourget is a *psychologiste intime* who has managed to touch a responsive chord in the hearts of the ladies of this per-

verse generation. He is peculiarly theirs, but he and his fellows, Lavedan and Barrès, belong rather to the school of Renan, a school which demands and will repay a separate study. For the present then: *Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa.*

To return to Zola. No author stands alone, whether as to his past or his future. The realism of Zola has its forerunners in the accurate scenic descriptions of Gautier, and in the laborious psychological analyses of Balzac. The Goncourts, too, before his day had shown literature how to deal with the lowest social strata, as in *Germanie Lacertaux*. Indeed with Zola the whole matter is a question of degree. He proposes to be more true to nature than his predecessors, and by nature he proposes to understand not the nature of the reading, or the educated class, but of the great mass of the community. To his task he brings a wider and a keener observation than any of his contemporaries, but his books are not great because of their photographic accuracy, but because of the poetic idealism with which he infuses a naturalism that without this would be as dreary as the subjects of which it treats. If *Germinal* pictured the life of the average miner, it would be as that life itself is, oppressive in its narrowing, dull monotony. It avoids this, and gives us rather idealized types in which the genius of Zola has broken the bonds of his theory. The same has been the case with all his followers who have achieved success, or have deserved it. Of the five who coöperated with Zola in the *Soirées de Médan*, Maupassant soon drifted back to the early influences of Flaubert; Hennique, second in talent of the group, has become somewhat of an eclectic; Ceard records in Huret's *Enquête sur l'Evolution Littéraire* his view that the literature of imagination may justly claim a coördinate place with the literature of observation, while Alexis and Huysmans, more catholic than their pope, find but scanty fame or patronage. These caricatures of their masters have certainly met all the success they deserve. Huysmans makes himself the apostle of pessimism. If men would but read his books,

he might be a successful missionary, for one cannot deny that there is a distorted talent in the wearisome succession of nastiness which makes up *A Rebours* or *Là Bas*. But we were taught to read for something better than to give ourselves a literary nausea. We miss the moral purpose that made us patient with *Nana*. Nature is full of decay, but books that seem to spring from the phosphorescence of a rotting brain are not naturalistic, though their author may shelter himself beneath that flag. Indeed we grow impatient of these schools and cliques. "What matters it," says Mirbeau, in this same book of M. Huret, "if a book be by naturalist, psychologist or symbolist, if it is good? Labels are nonsense." An anxious classification into schools suggests the weakness of imitators rather than the robust originality of creative genius. This sterility, sheltering itself behind a cult of method and form, is the most discouraging element in the present literary outlook. It would perhaps be too much to say that it was due to the dilettante epicureanism which Renan has known how to clothe with such attractive grace. Certainly it is in entire accord with it. This inquiry, however, would lead too far afield, but the promise of the future seems to us to be with those who draw the strength of their work from the close study of reality, whose art is not for art's sake but for truth's sake. It is such men as Henique in the drama, and Rosny in fiction who are taking up and carrying on the work of Zola, none the less truly because they do not call themselves by his name.

B. W. WELLS.